

lowed by the Christian flock of Thagastum ; but that it must be a consolation to the curé to feel how much nearer he was to his predecessor than the Pope to St. Peter, as there have not been half-a-dozen successors in the line between them.

The next morning I set out on my tired steed for our new camp at Kef Laks, where Salvin had been hard at work, and where we made our most successful forays, of which my friend has already given an account to the readers of 'The Ibis.'

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XLVII.—*On the Nesting of* *Aquila imperialis* *and* *Falco sacer*.

By W. H. SIMPSON, M.A., F.Z.S.

(Plate XII.)

LATE in the afternoon of the 26th of April last, having driven across the treeless plain of the Dobrudska, I descended from the open plateau, which, in the part now alluded to, has a breadth of about forty miles, upon one of the small valleys communicating with the Danube. The bottom of this valley, like that of many others on the south side of the river east of Silistria, is on the same level as the Danube itself, the waters of that river during the spring and summer floods flowing back naturally for several miles towards the Turkish coast of the Black Sea. A portion of the valley is consequently converted into a series of swampy lakes, communicating with the river by means of a deep and narrow canal, the mouth of which has recently been banked up, in order to prevent the Danube from inundating the valley. Conformable to the course of this canal is a line of stout pollard willows, of no great height, which however, stunted as they are, afford the finest specimens of the arboreal world to be seen between here and the sea-coast. Low cliffs of limestone flank portions of the valley about the point where the Araba road descends into it ; in these cliffs it was supposed that *Vultur cinereus* might be found breeding, though that supposition turned out to be incorrect.

At this spot I had quitted the Araba and joined two friends, who had come to meet me on horseback, when our attention was immediately drawn to a large nest that completely filled the boll of one of the aforesaid pollards. It was not very conspi-

cuously apparent, as the branches, now thickening and becoming greener every day, formed a sort of leafy screen round the nest, which would have been well concealed a fortnight later. One of my friends rode up to the edge of the canal which ran between us and the tree, when forthwith two large Eagles very leisurely turned out within pistol-shot of him, and then, after flying within a hundred and fifty yards of our position, alighted on the brow of the adjoining hill. Judging from the light colour of some portions of the plumage, it was clear at once, even to the naked eye, that the birds were not Golden Eagles; yet I was at first much puzzled what to make of them, never having seen *Aquila imperialis* on the wing before.

These birds, on being examined through the telescope (for after the first alarm we never could get near them again), exhibited a variegated colouring, in which darkish-brown was much relieved by tawny, especially about the head and shoulders. The breast appeared very dark; but this might arise from the peculiar light which was thrown upon the birds by the setting sun. The cere exhibited a bright straw-colour, and appeared very large. The whole colouring was so different from the uniformly dark character which the mature *Aquila chrysaëtos* presents on the wing, that I felt sure the birds in question could not be of that species. It was of course still more easy to perceive they were not Sea-Eagles, and their size was sufficient to preclude them from being confounded with any of the smaller known European Eagles. Therefore on negative, if not on positive evidence, they stood convicted of being Imperial Eagles. Subsequently I saw another bird, evidently of the same species, sitting on the top of a hill overlooking an island in the Danube, but was never able to obtain a specimen. The Golden Eagle was never seen by me in this locality, though my friend has noticed a "black Eagle," which would appear to answer the description of the small dark variety of *Aquila chrysaëtos* which sometimes occurs in the south-east of Europe.

One would imagine that an Eagle's nest in a pollard ten feet high was not difficult to find; yet many had passed that way daily without noticing it. Still less difficulty attended the capture; all the romance usually attaching to such a feat disap-

peared. Nothing remained, after due and proper identification, but to walk up and take possession. The nest was of a good size, its exterior circumference being, at a guess, 15 feet; the interior was slightly depressed, but only enough to keep the eggs (two in number) from rolling out. It was lined with wool, which rested upon an immense circular platform of sticks entirely filling up the boll of the pollard, from which the young willow-branches sprang upwards in a circle all round the nest. By this means the entire structure was enclosed in a sort of arbour, which would screen the birds from the wind and sun, and from general observation. The eggs, which were slightly incubated, resemble each other considerably; the one figured (Plate XII. fig. 3) measuring 2·9 in. by 2·2 in., and being of a uniform dull-white colour, with frequent marks and scratches and occasionally larger blotches of pale brownish-grey.

On the evening of the 29th another fortunate discovery was made by the same party, and, this time, of the nest of a bird, whose eggs, it is believed, were almost unknown previously in authentic cabinets. We were strolling on a low flat island in the Danube, the edge of which is well covered with tall poplars and other trees. Opposite this belt of trees, and across the river, the Turkish shore rises pretty steeply to a level with the plateau of the Dobrudska, whilst behind, towards the mainland of Wallachia, there stretches an immense tract of low ground, partly swamp, partly forest, and partly open plain. A nest of *Milvus ater* had occupied us for a short time; but on getting close to the river again, in a place where the trees are very tall, and not thickly grouped, my friend and *cicerone* drew our attention to a good-sized nest, which was placed about one-third of the way up a tallish poplar. The nest was resting upon a large branch close to the boll of the tree, and appeared exceedingly easy of access. Whilst my friend was climbing towards it, the bird slipped off, and was shot immediately. It proved to be a female *Falco sacer*. Of this I was not quite certain at the time, being then unacquainted with the distinctions between *Falco lanarius* and *Falco sacer*, though the size inclined me to decide in favour of the latter. The nest was not very much larger than those of the numerous Hooded Crows we had

already examined, but was deep and comfortably lined, appearing, however, from the outside as like a large Crow's nest as one bundle of sticks is like another. The eggs, four in number, were slightly incubated. In size, they seem to be intermediate between those of the Peregrine and Gyr-falcon, being, however, longer in proportion to their breadth. Two of them are light in colour, the other two much darker. One of the latter is accurately represented in the accompanying plate (Plate XII. fig. 1). It measures 2·2 in. by 1·6 in.

The male bird was well observed shortly afterwards. Sitting, utterly motionless, on the top of a dead tree, with his head turned over his shoulder, he seemed so mournfully conscious of the catastrophe which had befallen his family, that I felt utterly ashamed of having added murder to robbery in my desire to possess myself of an unknown bird. If the gun had still been in my hand I could have shot him easily, as he then seemed indifferent to his fate, but it so happened that he flew away before that weapon actually arrived, and thus escaped being involved in the ruin of his household.

This was the only pair of *Falco sacer* ever seen by me or by any of my friends in this part of the country. I am therefore induced to believe that the species is rare even here, though the bare and treeless chalk downs of the Dobrudska afford innumerable Bustards, both great and small, if that be the food they covet.

The second figure of the accompanying Plate, which has been prepared by Mr. W. C. Hewitson, represents the larger of the two eggs of Bonelli's Eagle (*Aquila bonellii*), concerning the taking of which I have already given full details in the last number of 'The Ibis' (see *anteà*, p. 291 *et seq.*).

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XLVIII.—*Further Observations on some of the Birds of Western Greece.* By W. H. SIMPSON, M.A., F.Z.S., &c.

AMONGST the lesser birds of prey which frequent the neighbourhood of Mesolonghi and the lower parts of Western Greece generally, *Circus æruginosus* and *Circus cyaneus* are very conspicuous, especially in winter. *C. æruginosus* breeds in the great reed-fen,



Fig 1.

IMPERIALIS.